

# Character Class

## Wilder -- Impassioned Psionicist

by Skip Williams



If you've become familiar with psionic powers, and you've built up a list of favorites -- or if you're new to psionics and you're familiar with only a few powers -- the wilder from the *Expanded Psionics Handbook* is worth a look. It's helpful to think of the wilder as the psychic equivalent of the sorcerer. The character chooses a few powers from the psion/wilder class lists and uses them well. The sheer number of powers available makes almost any type of character possible. Your wilder can excel at blasting foes into oblivion, ferreting out secrets, commanding sentient creatures, or have just about any other theme you can dream up.

### Assets

A wilder has a substantial array of psionic powers and a few unique mental tricks. Here's a brief list of things you'll have going for you when you choose a wilder:

- **Fair Weapon Selection:** A wilder can use any simple weapon. Simple weapons aren't the best in the game, but having access to the whole category gives a wilder plenty of options for those times when psionic power fails or simply needs to be held in reserve.
- **Fair Attack Bonus:** A wilder's base attack bonus is three points every four levels (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*), which is not great but is still quite good. Wilders do pretty well with weapons or powers that require attack rolls.
- **Fair Skill Points:** A wilder receives four skill points per level, which allows the character to excel at a variety of different kinds of tasks.
- **Good Power Selection:** The wilder power list is both broad and deep. It includes powers for attack, defense, transportation, information gathering, and more. A wilder doesn't know many powers, but the powers she knows usually pack a punch.
- **Good Will Saves:** A wilder uses the best progression for Will saves (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). Wilders are mentally and spiritually resilient. The volatile mind power affords wilders extra protection against some kinds of mental influences.
- **Winning Ways:** Wilders have high Charisma scores (because Charisma governs their psionic abilities). Some wilders can literally talk their way out of trouble, especially if they give themselves some psionic help.
- **Wild Surge:** A wilder's primal emotions fuel her psionic powers, and she can tap into her emotional reserves to give the powers she manifests extra intensity. Starting at 1st level, a wilder can boost the manifester level for any power she manifests herself by +1. This boost also augments the power as well (if the power can be augmented) as noted in the wilder class description. This ability carries some risks (see *Psychic Enervation*, below), but the results are worth the risks if the wilder is careful.

Starting at 3rd level, the wilder can boost her manifester level by up to +2 with a wild surge. This increases to +3 at 7th level, +4 at 11th level, +5 at 15th level, and +6 at 19th level.

- **Elude Touch:** Starting at 2nd level, a wilder gains a bonus to her touch Armor Class equal to her Charisma bonus. Her touch Armor Class, however, can never exceed her regular Armor Class.
- **Surging Euphoria:** Starting at 4th level, a wilder experiences a burst of energy and confidence whenever she uses her wild surge ability. The wilder gains a +1 morale bonus on attack rolls, damage rolls, and saving throws for a number of rounds equal to the manifester level increase the surge provides.  
At 12th level, this power provides a +2 bonus; at 20th level, the bonus rises to +3.
- **Volatile Mind:** Starting at 5th level, a wilder achieves extra resistance to mental influences or probes from other psionics. When anyone tries to use a telepathy power against the wilder, the power point cost increases by 1 point.  
At 9th level, the extra cost increases to 2 points; at 13th level, the extra cost increases to 3 points; and at 17th level, the extra cost increases to 4 points.

## Weaknesses

The wilder's advantages come with a price. Here are a few things you'll want consider when thinking about a wilder character:

- **Limited Psionic Options:** A wilder has plenty of psionic power points but begins play with only a single psionic power. The wilder gains a 2nd power at 2nd level and an additional power at every even-numbered level, to a maximum of 11 powers at 20th level. A wilder must choose her powers carefully.
- **Psychic Enervation:** Each time a wilder uses her wild surge ability, there's a chance the effort will leave her debilitated. Immediately following a wild surge, there's a chance equal to 5% times the manifester increase provided by the wild surge that the wilder becomes dazed until the end of her next turn. If enervation strikes, the wilder also loses psionic power points equal to her wilder level.
- **Poor Fortitude and Reflex Saves:** Wilders have the worst progression for both Fortitude and Reflex saves (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). Wilders aren't great at shrugging off effects that affect whole areas or attack their bodies. Wilders have access to defensive powers that improve their saving throws or even make some saving throws unnecessary. Learning such powers, however, leaves less room for other useful powers in the wilder's repertoire.
- **Poor Armor Class:** A wilder can wear only light armor and use any kind of shield (except tower shields). A wilder isn't fatally vulnerable to physical attacks, but they're vulnerable nevertheless.
- **Poor Hit Points:** The wilder has 6-sided hit dice, which doesn't give her enough hit points to stand in the thick of battle, but should provide enough to survive unexpected assaults or disasters.

## Playing a Classy Wilder

People who play great wilders usually keep the following in mind:

### Choose Your Psionic Powers Carefully

Your personal repertoire of psionic powers provides your main tools for dealing with life as an adventurer. Your psionic toolbox, however, is small, so be very careful about what you put in it. To make things worse, it's difficult to discard a power and learn a new one in its place. (The *psychic reformation* power allows you to change the powers you know if you give up some experience points.) On the other hand, you have plenty of psionic power points to spend each day, and you can count on being able to use the few powers you know over and over again each day throughout your career.

To make the best of your situation, stick to powers that you'll want to use often. It's hard to beat offensive or defensive powers for repeated use, but also consider powers that expand your options during an encounter or battle. That is, start out with powers such as *crystal shard*, *energy ray*, *defensive precognition*, or *inertial armor*, but don't overlook powers such as *control flames*, *far hand*, or *missive*, especially as you advance in level.

When choosing powers, don't forget your wild surge ability. Look for powers that improve with your manifester level or that can be augmented (all the powers in the previous paragraph can be augmented).

### Use Your Psionic Powers Often

As noted earlier, you have plenty of psionic power points to spend each day, so don't hold back. It's never a good idea to use your powers recklessly or to expend all your psionic potential in your first few encounters each day, but unspent power points at the end of the day haven't done you or your group any good. It's OK (and advisable) to keep a reserve of points available in case you get in a bind when only a certain power will do (or if you have an encounter after you and your group have retired for the night). As a rule of thumb, keep enough power points on hand to manifest your highest-level power once or twice (if you know or strongly suspect trouble lies ahead, keep more power in reserve). Otherwise, put your powers into play as often as you can.

### Use Those Wild Surges

Your wild surge power is what distinguishes you from other psionicists, so use it as often as you can. You always risk disability from psychic enervation when you use a wild surge, but you shouldn't let that keep you from using this important ability. You can reduce your risk by limiting the manifester level boost you claim from a wild surge (though this also reduces the benefits you gain from your surging euphoria ability).

A better way to protect yourself against psychic enervation is to stick close to your friends so they can protect you if you become dazed after a wild surge. If you find yourself facing danger alone, it's best to avoid wild surges unless the benefits you gain offset the risks. Also avoid wild

surges in any situation where your group must move quickly (either to flee from danger or to make the best of some opportunity) unless one of your allies is prepared to drag you along if you're dazed.

### **Think Ahead**

You've got to keep the future in mind when choosing your powers, but that's not the only time a little foresight will help. Remember that psionic powers aren't the only tools you have at your disposal. A few weapons, alchemical items, and other equipment can greatly expand your options.

Also remember that you are among your party's most vulnerable members, especially when psychic enervation strikes. Make sure you have a proper place in the party's marching order -- preferably in the middle where you have at least one ally between you and your foes.

### **Remember Your Friends**

As a wilder, you literally run on emotional energy, but don't let that get the better of you. You can be passionate about your abilities without being foolhardy or pushy. Learn to use your powers to help your whole party succeed, and remember that you need the rest of your party for protection.

**The Party's Front Line:** The rogue, ranger, bard, or monk in your group will often serve as a scout for the rest of the party and locate your foes for you to attack with your powers. These characters, along with the party's more heavily armored types (particularly fighters and paladins) also form a fighting line that keeps enemies away from you. Be ready to support those characters with your powers in case they get into trouble. When manifesting your powers, be careful to aim them so your friends aren't caught in their destructive effects. Nothing wears out your welcome faster than misaimed powers that hurt friends as well as foes.

Front-line characters are in the best position to protect and aid you when psychic enervation strikes. Be sure these characters know that you're prone to becoming dazed when you push yourself too hard, and stay close to them in case you become incapacitated.

**Spellcasters and other Manifesters:** You probably aren't the only character in your party who can wield psychic powers or spells, so don't act as though you are. Arcane spellcasters can produce many effects that are similar to what you can produce. Divine spellcasters have potent spells, too. Other psionic classes, such as psychic warriors, have power lists that are slightly more limited but probably more focused than yours.

Learn what spells and psionic powers are available in your group and be ready to fill in the gaps in each character's capabilities if you can. When your capabilities overlap with another character's, try to divide tasks between you in some equitable manner. For example, if you have a collection of attack powers good for blasting foes, ask the spellcasters and other manifesters in your group to handle other tasks such as transportation, information gathering, and defense. Blasting foes can be fun, however, so don't hog all the action. You might divide the battlefield

into sections that different characters can cover, or develop a sequence of attacks that can really hurt a foe. For example, you might use telekinetic thrust to bombard a dangerous foe with physical objects while your allies hammer the same opponent with energy or mind-affecting attacks.

## Some Key Equipment

No matter how carefully you choose your psionic powers, you still rely on your gear to reach your full potential. The essentials for you include:

- **Primary Melee Weapon:** You can learn powers such as *dissipating touch* or *hammer* that might seem to make melee weaponry unnecessary. Such powers use up the limited number of powers you can learn and rob you of the flexibility you need to be a truly great wilder.  
If you plan on using a shield -- and you should -- a heavy mace or morningstar is hard to beat for damage potential in a one-handed weapon. If you're willing to give up a shield, consider a longspear -- it has reach and will help you keep your enemies a little farther off.
- **Backup Melee Weapon:** You probably won't do much toe-to-toe fighting, but it's still a good idea to have a second weapon available in case you lose your primary weapon or if it proves ineffective. Having a light slashing weapon such as a dagger or handaxe is a real lifesaver when a monster swallows you whole or when you must fight in a restricted space. When you're literally in the belly of a beast, it might prove hard to manifest a power.
- **Ranged Weapon:** A crossbow can prove as effective as a low-level attack power against some opponents. Use it to conserve your power points when the opposition isn't threatening enough to merit their use. You can use either a heavy or a light crossbow. The former deals more damage but takes longer to reload. At the beginning of your career, the light crossbow might prove a better choice because you're likely to find yourself out of other options. As you gain experience (and money for better equipment), you might prefer to deal more damage with a single shot.  
If you need to conserve your money, or you just don't have enough strength to lug a pile of weapons along when you go adventuring, a sling is a cheap, lightweight alternative to a crossbow.
- **Armor and Shield:** Defensive powers such as *inertial armor* and *mental barrier* might tempt you to skip wearing armor altogether. That isn't a good idea, especially at the beginning of your career. Start with the best light armor you can afford, and plan to carry a shield unless you really want to use a two-handed weapon. At low levels, that usually means studded leather armor and a buckler at least. Move up to a heavy shield as soon as you can afford it.  
Later in your career, consider moving up to a chain shirt.
- **Backup Powers:** Despite your plentiful supply of power points, you're going to exhaust your psionic potential sooner or later, so it pays to carry an extra reserve. It's hard to beat a cognizance crystal for keeping a few power points on hand.  
A dorje is useful for manifesting powers that you use often, such as body adjustment, force screen, or biofeedback. Best of all, you can use a dorje to manifest any power on

the wilder class list even if you don't know the power. Because you know only a few powers, a dorje expands your psionic options considerably.

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### About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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